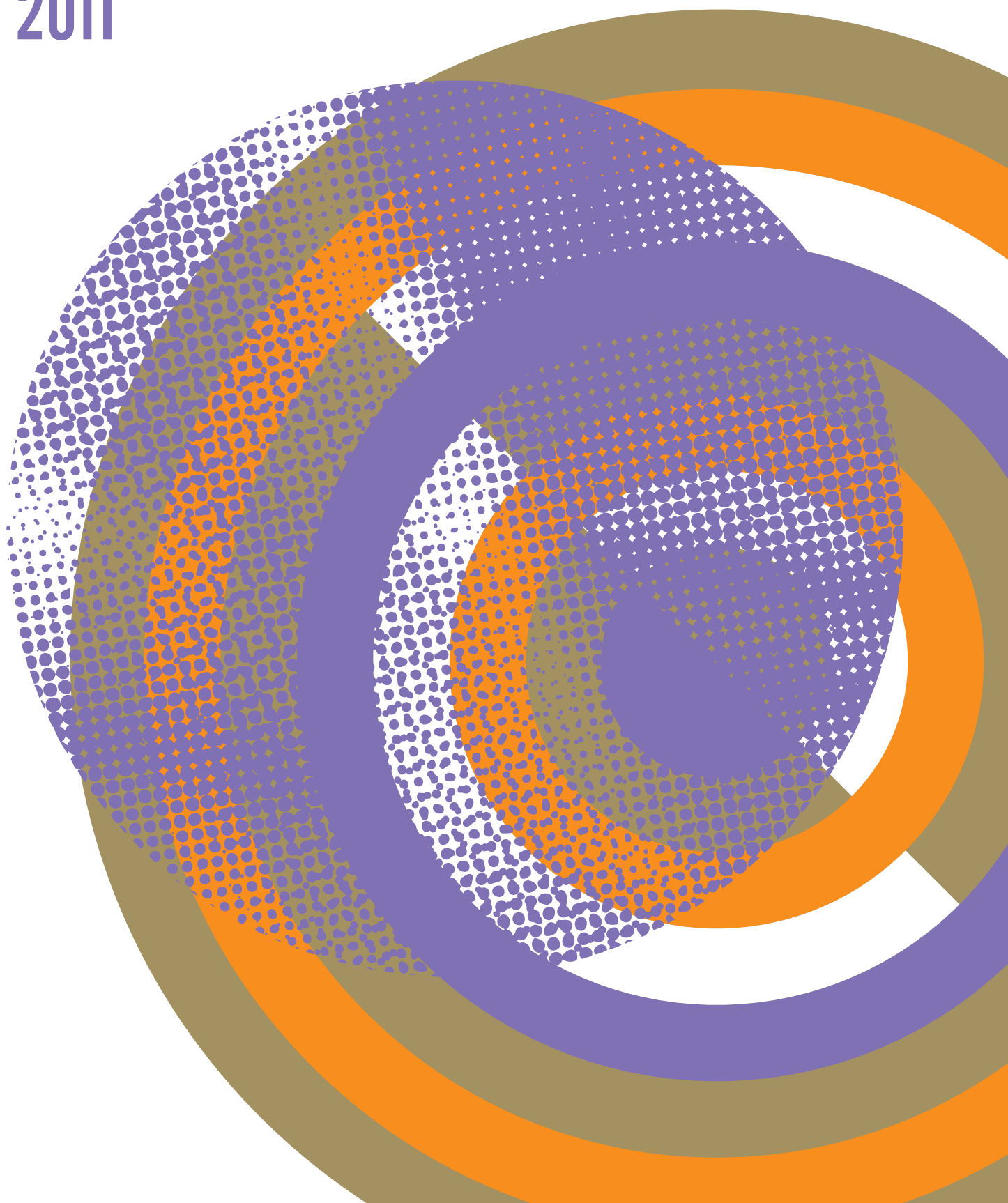
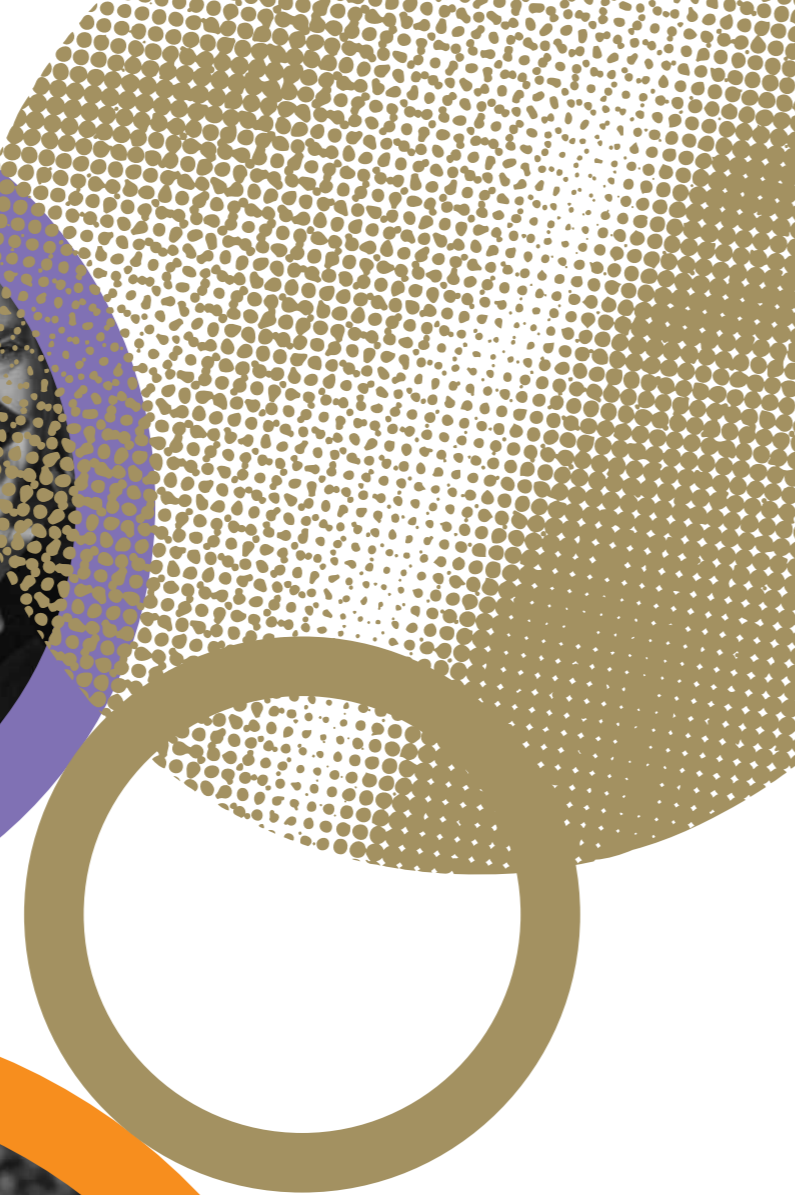


**AONTAS  
ANNUAL REPORT &  
FINANCIAL STATEMENTS  
2011**





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## FOREWORD

The importance of adult and community education as a lifeline for our society at this time when individuals and communities are suffering severe hardship and ill-effects due to the continuing economic recession cannot be overemphasised. The political emphasis is now rightly currently focussed on a job activation agenda. However for many people, returning to work is not an immediate option due to the obvious lack of availability of opportunities as well as the fact that there are many in our society who are not socially or educationally empowered or equipped to take up opportunities even should they present.

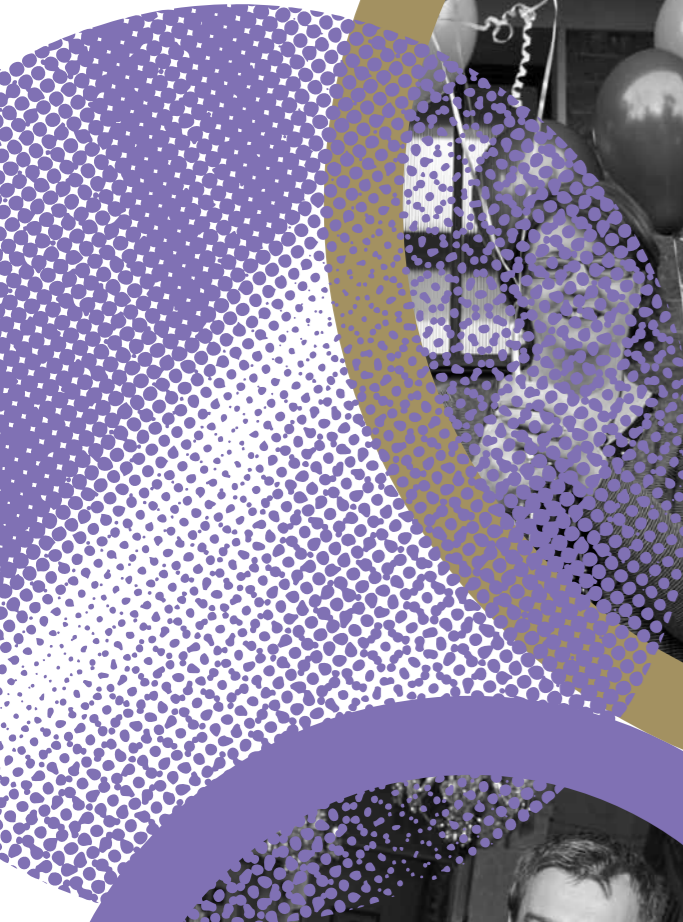
Ever increasing numbers are now experiencing the pain of disadvantage through the change in their personal and social circumstances brought about by unemployment and burgeoning debt. The opportunity to return to adult and community education provides people with the means to seek alternative ways to fulfil their potential in a world and society which may appear to them to have lost clear definition.

As an organisation, AONTAS has adapted to the changing focus and demands of its membership and their perceived role in society in the current economic climate. The organisation continues to work tirelessly to highlight and promote the work of the sector. AONTAS provides clear and vital communication and information to adults returning to education so that they are afforded the choices appropriate to their circumstances. Involvement in adult and community education has long been recognised as an enriching and empowering experience. It provides learners with an aspiration, not only to improve their practical capabilities, but also to reinforce their sense of

well-being, self-esteem and pride in themselves not only as valuable individuals and members of their families, communities and society as a whole. This has never been more important than now as people's personal worlds are shrinking due to lack of basic resources. Adult and community education provides an alternative outlet for those who can only seek to redirect their own personal, social and civic lives alongside those who are up-skilling and retraining for the labour market.

All agencies and organisations are now involved in a process of transformational change. For many, this means further struggle but for AONTAS it means a renewed and even stronger conviction and commitment to ensure that the needs of adult learners are maintained at the forefront of all funding debates. Those who represent the lifelong learning community have a universal mandate to ensure that adult and community education is kept to the forefront of all political debate and funding opportunities.

Marian Duffy,  
*President, AONTAS*



# OVERVIEW

## Introduction

AONTAS has just completed the first year of its current strategic plan which was adopted at the Annual General Meeting on May 10th 2011. Since 2008 when the first cutbacks of the current recession were implemented we have concentrated on focussing our resources very carefully, prioritising the message that adult and community education plays a key role in addressing the challenges facing Ireland and its people today. This has proven to be no easy task as the full extent of Ireland's economic woes began to unfold. The strategic plan which was the result of an extensive consultation process refined the goals of AONTAS and focussed on three key themes i.e.

- Value
- Voice
- Visibility

We have set ourselves some ambitious targets for what is probably the most challenging three year period in the history, not just of AONTAS but of the sector as a whole.

## Promoting Adult and Community Education

Regardless of the doom and gloom of the economy and the challenges of a snowbound January the year got off to a lively start with the national Adult Learners' Festival which ran from the 21st to 25th of February. The Festival was opened by Minister of State Sean Haughey, performing one of the final functions of his term of office and was addressed by Micheal D. Higgins who had started campaigning for the Presidential election. As always the STAR award ceremony was a joyful occasion showcasing the creativity, motivation and resilience of adult learners and providers. The week saw more than 400

events being staged all over the country organised by VECs, community groups, libraries, workplaces and many more. It is estimated that these events were attended by 47,000 people. AONTAS promoted all of these events through its Festival website and social media as well as local and national media. Usually the Festival ends with a Lobby for Learning day on the final day of the Festival but this was not possible due the General Election falling on that day.

## Influencing Public Policy

AONTAS did however organise a pre-election campaign ensuring that adult and community education was brought to the attention of political candidates from all parties. AONTAS's key priority was the preservation of the core work of the adult and community education service, particularly in the light of funding cutbacks and the embargo on public service recruitment which put severe pressure on the service in many areas as absent staff were not replaced. AONTAS also focussed on the supports for adult learners returning to education, in particular the changes to the Back to Education Allowance. In February AONTAS responded to a request from the Further Education Section of the Department of Education and Skills to make a submission outlining the role of adult education and in particular community education in addressing the National Skills Strategy. This was an important piece of work especially in the context of the policy changes which were announced by the new government during the year.

## Meeting the Challenges of Change

The announcement in 2011 of the merger of the 33 VECs into 16 new Local Education and Training Boards and the disbanding of FAS heralded some of the biggest changes the sector has ever experienced.

Coupled with the establishment of SOLAS in July and the rolling out of the National Employment and Entitlements Strategy the adult and community education service is set to see a major overhaul of its systems, processes and delivery with the LETBS playing a key role. Other changes include the merger of FETAC and HETAC within the new Qualifications and Quality Assurance Authority of Ireland and the new FETAC validation processes. All of these changes are presenting real and significant challenges for the sector as it prepares to merge people and organisations with a different ethos, organisational culture, levels of training and so on. However AONTAS is of the view that they also present significant opportunities in that there is now a unique chance to contribute to the development of a new integrated and comprehensive further education and training service for Irish adults. AONTAS has responded to the call for feedback from the Department of Education and Skills to its consultation document circulated in late December and looks forward to contributing its expertise and participating in any further consultations or processes necessary to the formation of the new service.

## Working in Partnership

In the spirit of collaboration and making the best use of our collective resources a joint policy/promotion working group was established between AONTAS and NALA. The group met three times in 2011 to share information and to work together more closely on areas of common interest. With that in mind AONTAS participated in events during National Adult Literacy Awareness Week and a joint event is planned for the Lobby for Learning day of the 2012 Adult Learners' Festival. NALA agreed to distribute the AONTAS Information Booklet at events such as the National Ploughing Championships which traditionally has a high level of participation of rural people in particular, and NALA and the Community Education Network worked together on sharing information and expertise in relation to FETAC. Coupled with the joint policy/promotion group AONTAS agreed to partner NALA in a Wheel-funded project to identify areas of collaboration. This was facilitated

over four days by external consultants, Prospectus and examined in detail a range of areas of common interest. Both organisations have already put many of the recommendations into practice. A full report of the Wheel project is awaited.

## Providing a Voice for Adult Learners

Apart from the Adult Learners' Festival AONTAS also staged two other major events during the year. One was the Adult Learners' Forum of Ireland (ALFI) meeting in October which was attended by over 50 adult learners from all over the country and which saw the launch of the AONTAS Toolkit for setting up a Local Adult Learners' Forum. An excellent model of practice was presented by the Limerick Adult Learners' Forum complimented by an input from John Gates of the Welsh Adult Learners' Forum. Discussions focussed on the way ahead and the seminar ended on an upbeat note courtesy of John Lonergan, former governor of Mountjoy prison who closed the day with an inspirational speech.

The second major event was the AONTAS national conference on community education. Entitled Making a Living; Making a Life, the conference was attended by over 200 participants who had the opportunity to hear national and international speakers and to make a first response to the establishment of SOLAS. The conference was also addressed by the Minister of State, Ciaran Cannon who gave strong words of encouragement to the community education sector. A number of interactive workshops provided a space for dialogue and AONTAS is planning to draw together the outcomes of these into a strategy paper for the future development of community education.

## Building an Evidence Base for Adult Learning

Research has always been an important element of the work of AONTAS and although research funding has diminished over the past four years AONTAS still managed to undertake two key pieces of research in 2010 and 2011. Both focussed on community education. The first, which was also the first national research on community education,

examined the outcomes and impact of Department of Education and Skills funded community education. Entitled *Community Education: More than just a Course*, the research showed that community education plays a key role in responding to the needs of disadvantaged learners, develops self esteem and confidence laying the foundation for further learning and training as well as having health and social benefits. It was also shown to be good value for money by measuring what learners gave back to their communities in terms of voluntary effort. The research which was launched during the Adult Learners' Festival was complimented by an additional piece which concentrated on the work of community education groups aspiring to the social change model of community education. *Sowing the Seeds of Social Change* was completed in the Autumn of 2011 and has strengthened the message that community education plays a vital role in attracting back to education and training people who had few opportunities to benefit from education first time round. It also emphasised the importance of learning for personal, family and community development, a message which can not be ignored in the current contextual emphasis on instrumental learning and the Labour Market.

### Providing Information to Adult Learners

AONTAS continued to develop its Information Referral Service which has seen a high level of use over the past year. The Information Referral Booklet was updated and disseminated widely. Feedback indicates that the booklet is a key resource for both providers and learners as it contains a comprehensive overview of courses, supports and contacts. Of course technology has significantly changed the way people source information and the majority of information seekers have used the website as opposed to telephone queries. AONTAS has recorded more than 40,000 visits to the information section of its website in 2011, by far the most popular usage overall. Accessing information remains a key challenge for prospective adult learners as they try to negotiate the plethora of schemes, eligibility requirements and funding supports for learning programmes. AONTAS

constantly updates its information sources to ensure that they are accurate and easy to access.

### Representing AONTAS

AONTAS staff and Executive Committee members represented AONTAS at home and abroad throughout the year bringing the message that adult and community education is not only an essential part of the education system, but also that it is alive and well despite the circumstances in which all of us are currently working.

### Conclusion

Throughout the year AONTAS has endeavoured to work closely with other stakeholders in the sector and with colleagues in the Department of Education and Skills, Further Education Section and in the Further Education Development Unit. We acknowledge the continuing support of the Department for our work and we endeavour to use our experience and expertise to enhance the work of the Department and to feed into policy and decision making. With the current changes the role of AONTAS has never been more important. As a membership organisation we are in a unique position to engage with providers, learners and policy makers and we look forward to playing a major part in the formation of the new service.

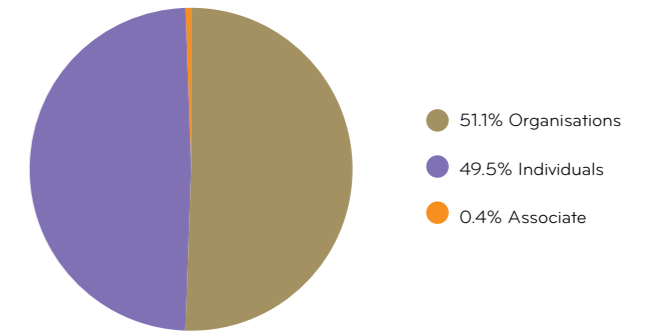
Berni Brady,  
Director, AONTAS



## SECTION 1 VALUING ADULT LEARNING

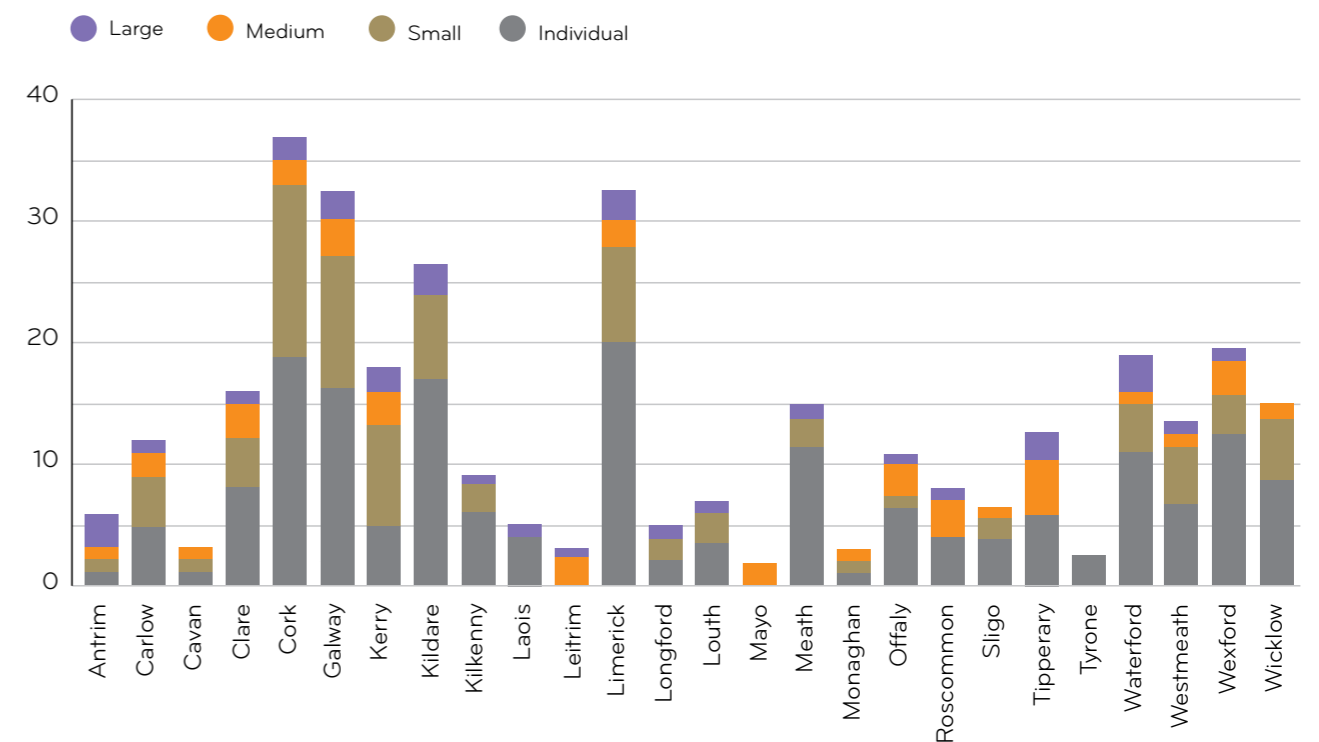
### AONTAS Membership

The strength and credibility of AONTAS as an organization lies in its diverse membership which comprises an impressive pool of experience and expertise in adult and community education across the country. As of 31st December the AONTAS membership comprised 569 members. The breakdown of membership illustrated in the pie chart opposite, now includes 291 organisations, 276 individuals and 2 associate members. A full list of AONTAS members is available online at [www.aontas.com/membership/](http://www.aontas.com/membership/)



In percentage terms membership type can be broken down as follows: 51.1% organisations, 49.5% individuals and 0.4% associate. However, many adult educators or learners who are part of organisations subscribe as individual members and these account for 44% of the total individual membership.

### Geographical representation of members excluding Dublin (which accounts for 39% of membership, i.e. 206 members)



### Membership Recruitment

According to the trend in member applications, the largest number of individual and organisational membership applications was made in September and October. This could be attributed to the AONTAS conference when members could avail of a reduced fee signifying the need for a similar membership recruitment campaign with monetary incentives.

As with any membership organization there is always a turnover of members and AONTAS is no exception. Following the annual review of membership payments there was a readjustment in the number of members, showing the total number of members lapsed during 2011 at 29 members – 5% of the total membership. Many members cited the loss of funding or amalgamation between organizations as the reason for ceasing membership. Although this was a greater challenge to the organization in 2010, with the lapsing of 8% of the membership, it is an area AONTAS will address over the course of the strategic plan. On a more positive note, the number of new members that joined AONTAS in 2011 was 68, representing 11% of the total membership.

The approach taken regarding membership recruitment is based on the goal of creating greater representation, geographical and range of provider, of organisational members. To this end the following strategies are employed to grow the AONTAS membership i.e. through existing members; at regional meetings; through the STAR award applications; during the Adult Learners' Festival; the AONTAS community education conference and at all national meetings.

### Membership Meetings

The Annual General Meeting represented the most significant meeting in the membership events calendar as it involved the adoption of the AONTAS Strategic Plan 2011-2013. The Strategic Plan was developed through an extensive consultation process during 2010, details of which are outlined in the Annual Report of 2010. Members responded very enthusiastically to the new Strategic Plan citing its relevance, focus and ambition as a valuable support for the future development and sustainability of the adult and community education sector. Two new members of the AONTAS Executive Committee were also welcomed at this meeting: Mary Hilda Cavanagh (IVEA) and Gillian Wild (Waterford Institute of Technology).

### Community Education Network

The Irish Community Education Network, which was established in 2007, as a political platform of independent community education groups within the AONTAS membership addresses the actions under all three themes of the AONTAS strategic plan. This unique network seeks to increase visibility, raise the voice of, and promote the value of community education through a collective process of participatory meetings which capitalises on the expertise within the sector while supporting new organisations. The work of the network is guided by a steering group for its overall development and direction. With membership of over 140 community education organisations it is the largest network of independent community education groups in the country and the only structure at national level which is dedicated to this distinct form of education provision.

### CEN Work in 2011

In its fourth year the main focus of the CEN was to consolidate the work achieved and create a new structure for developing the network while responding to the changing demands that community education organizations are experiencing. A significant shift took place which refocused the work of the network from its three pillars, of Resource, Recognition for, and Raising the profile of community education, to developing a more inclusive, effective and responsive community of practitioners reflecting the needs and expertise within the network. A diagrammatic representation of the new structure is outlined below.



The key CEN activities for 2011, in line with the new focus, included:

- Hosting two national network meetings, Lobbying for Community Education; and Developing a New Phase of the Community Education Network. Reports are available online: <http://www.aontas.com/commed/meetings.html>
- Hosting a joint AONTAS CEN and NALA seminar focusing on practical examples of FETAC level 3 validation and the integration of NALA's distance learning service into community education provision.

- Supporting the development of, and participating in, the AONTAS conference on community education 'Making a Living, Making a Life'.
- Securing The Wheel Training Links Funding for training in continuous professional development for a social action model of community education and tools for measuring the outcomes of community education.
- Updating the CEN funding mechanism position paper.

The work was supported by 8 meetings of a newly constructed steering group and 1 policy subgroup meeting. Results from the national meetings include:

- Increased recognition for the CEN as the authentic voice of independent community education organisations.
- Increased collaboration through the active participation of other organizations in meetings e.g. NALA, Age and Opportunity and the Department of Adult and Community Education, NUI Maynooth.
- Social media training for members to support their information and advocacy work.
- Challenges identified regarding FETAC validation and a collective approach developed to their resolution, which was communicated by letter to FETAC.
- Ownership and agreement on the new direction of the CEN for maximizing the effectiveness, responsiveness and influence of the network.
- Support for the development of the AONTAS Community Education Conference.

### Supporting the Learner Voice

One of the three themes of the AONTAS Strategic Plan is Voice. Under this theme a key objective agreed by membership is to support the capacity of learners to articulate issues of concern to them and to influence policy and practice in adult and community education.

Learners are central to the work of the AONTAS membership and AONTAS has supported Learner Networks within its membership since 2006, connecting with the Mature Students' Network and supporting the Senior Learners' Network to develop a Charter in 2010. In late 2010 AONTAS established the National Adult Learners' Forum which attracted an attendance of more than 80 learners and which created a space where learners could discuss how best to address their needs, and feed into policy. The work is supported by a steering group which met 6 times during the year concentrating on developing the Adult Learners' Forum of Ireland (ALFI). AONTAS also built strategic alliances with other organizations such as NALA and the Irish Mens' Sheds Association to share common goals in relation to the needs of learners.

### Adult Learners' Forum of Ireland (ALFI)

The Adult Learners' Forum of Ireland is a platform organised by and for adult learners with the support of AONTAS. Its purpose is:

- To articulate and represent the issues adult learners face on returning to education and training.
- To share information and build the capacity of adult learners to bring these issues to the attention of policy and decision makers.
- To promote the value of adult and community education.

Membership of ALFI is open to adults who are planning to or already pursuing second chance education opportunities with particular emphasis on Levels 1-5 on the National Qualifications Framework. Learners who are pursuing higher education opportunities for the first time as an adult are also welcome to join the ALFI. The second meeting of the Adult Learners' Forum of Ireland took place in October 2011 with the objective of building on the work already started by AONTAS in 2010. It was attended by over 50 learners from all over the country and from a broad range of interests. Two very interesting and inspiring presentations were made by the Limerick City Adult Learners' Forum and the Wales Adult Learners' Network outlining models of best practice for organizing at both a local and global level. A Toolkit for developing Local Adult Learner Forums was launched at the meeting and can be accessed on the AONTAS website at [http://www.aontas.com/download/pdf/toolkit\\_final.pdf](http://www.aontas.com/download/pdf/toolkit_final.pdf)

A lively round table discussion followed with learners identifying some new directions for their work. The meeting was closed by John Lonergan, former governor of Mountjoy prison who gave an inspirational speech allowing everyone to leave on a very positive note. A full report of the day is available on the AONTAS website: [http://www.aontas.com/download/pdf/report\\_final\\_dec.pdf](http://www.aontas.com/download/pdf/report_final_dec.pdf)

Three learners also participated in a video recording to promote the role of the ALFI. It can be viewed on the AONTAS YouTube channel <http://www.youtube.com/user/aontasireland/featured>

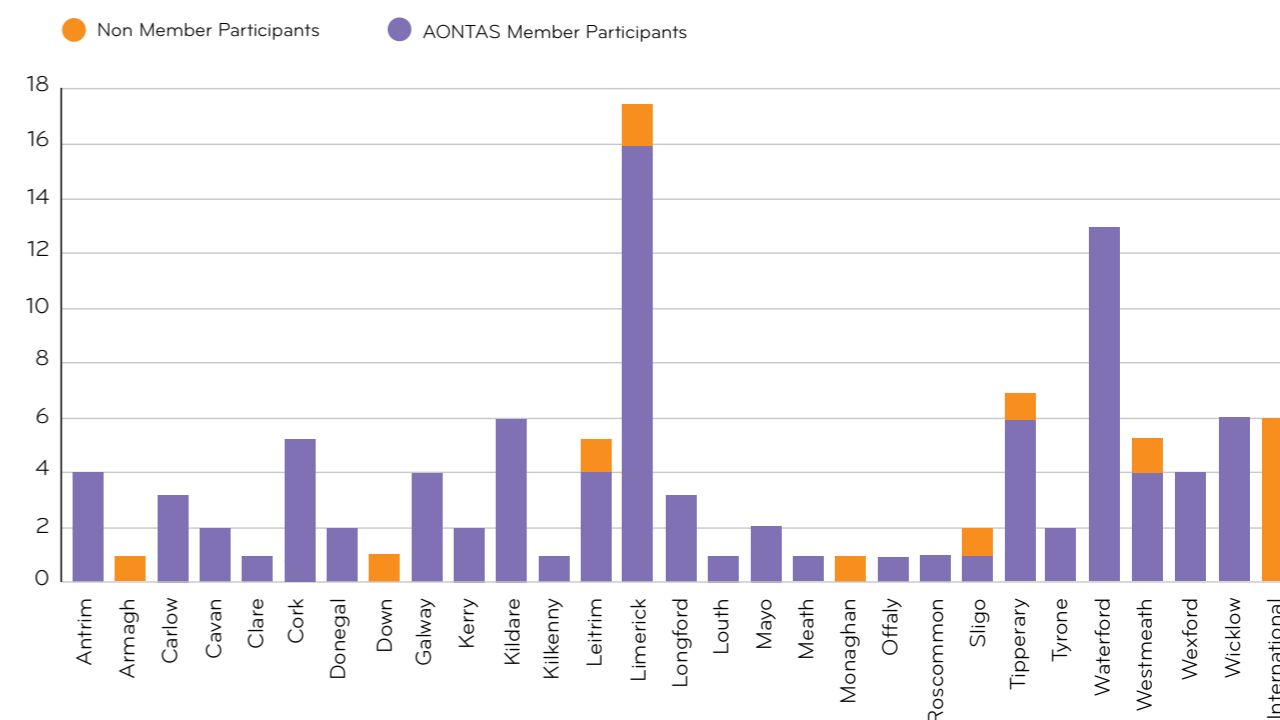
### Learner Involvement in AONTAS Events

Learners were supported to become actively involved in AONTAS events over the course of 2011. A learner workshop was organised at the AGM to respond to the actions laid out in the Strategic Plan. AONTAS also included learners as part of the general election campaign by asking them to submit stories on their experience of adult learning. A new story was uploaded on the website on a daily basis in the lead up to the general election. The stories were disseminated via Facebook and Twitter and aimed to highlight the broad spectrum of adult learners, the value of adult and community education, its impact on individuals, families and communities and the importance of adult and community education being adequately resourced. At the national conference in November learners were supported to participate in a learner-only workshop 'Why Choose Community Education' and contributed their learning experiences and pictures to a large visual display on the day. Video clips of learners expressing their views on the conference were posted on the AONTAS YouTube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/aontasireland/featured>

### AONTAS National Conference on Community Education, 'Making a living – Making a life'

Over 200 people from all over Ireland and abroad participated in the first national conference on Community Education, 'Making a living; Making a life': the role of community education for skills development and social inclusion, on Thursday 17th November 2011. The conference had active participation, sharing experiences, cultivating ideas and dialogue at its heart though inputs, discussion sessions and exhibitions. By drawing on national and international speakers we endeavoured to create a reflective space in which practitioners and learners, who are the true experts of community education in practice, developed strategies for addressing the issues facing the sector.

Participation at the conference excluding Dublin (which comprised 45% of participants)



The conference was officially opened by the AONTAS President Marian Duffy and was contextualised by inputs from Berni Brady and Niamh O'Reilly. A panel discussion held to demonstrate the value and role of community education comprised experts in community education practice: Liz Waters (An Cosan), Crona Gallagher (AEO, Co. Donegal VEC), Vivienne Glanville (Adult Learner and Ronanstown CDP) and John Evoy (Irish Men's Sheds Association).

Internationally renowned academic, Professor John Field of the University of Stirling synthesised the initial concepts raised in the opening session, setting the scene for the kind of community education sector we can aspire to and laying the foundations for the discussions. The 5 workshops provided key discussion spaces for exploring essential topics for the community education sector. These were:

- Capturing the outcomes of community education.
- Continuous professional development for community education.
- Community education for social action.
- Effective funding for community education.
- Why choose community education? A learners' perspective.

Minister for Training and Skills, Ciaran Cannon TD, opened the second part to the conference providing an overview of the developments within the Further Education sector, including the progress of SOLAS. Looking outside of Ireland, the Secretary General of the Swedish National Council of Adult Education, Britten Mansson Wallin, provided a keynote address outlining the organisation of, and the similarities between, folkbildning in Sweden and community education in Ireland.

The World Café round table discussion focussed on SOLAS and made the following recommendations.

**AONTAS and members need to lobby SOLAS for:**

- A distinct funding stream for community education.
- A learner-centred further education system that focuses on progression facilitated through effective guidance supports.
- Recognition of community education as possessing specific expertise which is an essential part of the further education service: e.g. hard to reach learners, effective learner-centred methodology, responsive provision, education for social cohesion and change.
- Non-accredited learning as a vital and important part of the education process. Community education is ideally placed to support learners onto the National Framework of Qualifications, if they so wish.

**Community education organisations should:**

- Embed education for social change into their provision through participation in continuous professional development activities.
- Engage in advocacy for community education with other organisations influencing the SOLAS consultation process: e.g. unions.
- Develop and use tools for measuring outcomes to support evidenced-based lobbying work at local and national (through AONTAS) level.

To close the day Senator Katherine Zappone provided an uplifting keynote address which outlined the distinct role of community education in addressing local issues as well as meeting the national priorities for education and skills. A copy of her presentation is available here at the following link: <http://senatorkatherinezappone.ie/index.php/entry/aontas-conference-on-community-education/public/>

## SECTION 2 MAKING ADULT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION VISIBLE

Throughout 2011 AONTAS responded to new developments in the adult and community education sector and continued to develop its use of technology in promoting key messages. Policy and promotion are the two activities which underpin the AONTAS communications strategy. While promotional activities contribute towards the overall visibility of adult learning, promotion is accompanied by a strong policy dimension.

AONTAS uses a number of communications tools to convey its key messages. While press releases are issued on a national basis they are only one element of a strategy which also includes targeted engagement with journalists and education correspondents, media training and support for members, social media activity, and the quarterly magazine Explore. Content developed for traditional offline marketing activities is reshaped and used within the new online environment. The impact of this approach is visible through analysis of websites, media monitoring and use of the Information Referral Service.

**Throughout 2011 AONTAS engaged with the media in the following ways:**

- 10 national press releases.
- 7 local press releases (about the STAR Awards).
- 3 letters to the editor (two of which were published).
- 16 blog entries.
- Targeted engagement with individual journalists, providing up to date information about developments in adult education, analysis and case studies.

- Delivery of content to national newspaper supplements on further and adult education.
- Social media activity through Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Two key times for promotional activity are the Adult Learners' Festival which takes place at the end of February, and the period of mid August through to mid September when interest in adult education is traditionally high .

### Festival Coverage in National and Local Media

The Festival featured in RTÉ's 'Winning Streak' programme as one of the good causes which benefits from funding from the National Lottery through the ALCES budget. AONTAS worked closely with South Tipperary VEC, who hosted a visit for the RTÉ team and provided a colourful exhibition of adult learning activities organized by the VEC and local community groups. From drumming, to taster workshops and information stands, to exhibitions of learners' work and food produced by participants on a cookery course, this morning event demonstrated the diversity of learning. The exhibition was attended by a large number of adult learners from all over the County many of whom demonstrated their new found skills. The programme was broadcast on the Saturday before the Festival and helped raise awareness about events happening nationwide. The Festival also featured in national media including the Irish Times and the Irish Examiner. The Festival was covered widely in local media, with 131 press articles generated. AONTAS participated in 13 local and national radio interviews, with event organisers also generating their own publicity. Media monitoring during the Festival period is used to analyse media activity and to inform the Festival PR strategy for the following year.

## Policy Development and Promotion

Policy actions and promotion of policy issues are co-ordinated by AONTAS through regular policy promotion team meetings. Policy issues of concern to AONTAS during 2011 included the preservation of the core work of the adult and community education service in the context of diminishing resources, the Public Sector Recruitment Embargo and financial supports for adult learners. The availability of clear, accurate information on adult learning as well as access to quality Adult Guidance Services were also key concerns. AONTAS work with the Community Education Network also highlighted the importance of the social value of adult learning, and the unique contribution of community education.

### Activities carried out during 2011 include:

#### Submissions and Position Papers

- Submission to the Department of Education and Skills on the contribution of community education in meeting the objectives of the National Skills Strategy.
- The development of a campaign toolkit 'Raise your Voice for Adult Learning' for use by members in the lead up to the General Election 2011.
- Analysis of key issues for adult learners and the sector, which was promoted via Politico and the Wheel.
- Analysis of the Programme for Government and its implications for adult and community education.
- Response to the establishment of SOLAS, the new Training and Education Authority.
- Analysis of Budget 2011 and its implications for adult learners and the adult and community education sector.

#### Relationships with policy makers

- 2011 saw many changes in the political environment, with a new government appointed in early March 2011. AONTAS met with new Minister for Training and Skills, Ciaran Cannon throughout the year to introduce him to our work. AONTAS also met with Minister for

Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn in advance of the Budget. AONTAS has also continued to build strong relationships with public servants in the Department of Education and Skills.

#### Stakeholder relationships

- During the year, AONTAS held meetings with the AEOA and the AEGAI, to discuss current issues facing the sector and enhance collaborative opportunities. As a result AONTAS made a presentation to the AEOA inservice event in November exploring how we can better exploit our common agenda to support and promote the sector.
- Representatives from both the AEOA and the AEGAI participated on the AONTAS Grundtvig Project 'Sowing the Learning Seeds', visiting Estonia and Slovenia to take part in their Adult Learners' Weeks.
- Three policy promotion meetings were held with NALA, involving all staff involved in policy promotion work in both organisations, with a view to enhancing collaboration. One of the outcomes of this work was a joint event organised during National Literacy Awareness Week. AONTAS also participated in the Stakeholder Group for the NALA 'Writeon.ie' initiative funded through the Labour Market Activation Measures.
- Ongoing engagement throughout the year with CEFA, through the launch of 'More than just a Course' and participation in the conference 'Making a living; Making a life'.
- Contribution to the work and policies of the National Access Office through representation on the Access Advisory Group.
- Participation on the National Library Council Steering Group supporting the FAS e learning in the Library project.
- Development of new partnerships to support the Adult Learners' Festival e.g. with Teagasc, OPW, museums and strengthening the links with current partners such as NQAI, FETAC, Trades Unions and businesses.

## AONTAS Information Referral Service

Access to accurate information is one of the key first steps in returning to education and training but the plethora of schemes with widely varying eligibility requirements and the fragmented range of information sources can be a major barrier for adult learners. The AONTAS Information Referral Service provides both direct and referral information on adult education, training and supports to individuals and groups. AONTAS receives calls, emails and website visits from prospective learners seeking information on courses, entitlements, grants and government's job initiatives. The rapid developments in information technology have dramatically changed how people seek and find information and the AONTAS Information Referral Service has adapted to those changes. Many more people now seek information via the web and are less likely to use the telephone as a first approach. Rather they may follow up with a telephone call having done some initial research online. The follow-up calls tend to be more complex often dealing with social welfare entitlements and funding eligibility requirements. There are also times when people need a fast response and speaking to a person is the best way to get this, for example after the announcement of special schemes such as the LMA measures, Springboard, Job bridge etc.

### Use of Web-based Information

AONTAS responds to the demand for web-based information by continually developing the information section of the website. Over the past year information on [www.aontas.com](http://www.aontas.com) has been continually updated to reflect new developments in adult education. The information section, except for the homepage, was the most visited section of the website in 2011 with 41,319 viewings. Throughout the year the most viewed pages were:

- How to become a counsellor 4,715.
- How to repeat your Leaving Certificate 3,981.
- Second Chance Education 3,847.

Worthy of note is that the financial support page was only viewed 18 times in the first semester of 2010 while it was viewed 2,264 times in the same period this year. A surge of interest; 5298 visitors in the month of February 2011, was registered during and immediately after the Adult Learners' Festival in February 2011. The Adult Learners' Festival website has a direct link to the information section so learners who look for an event can also find information on returning to education and/or training. This data highlights the importance of the Adult Learners' Festival not only as a celebration for adult learning but also as a way of directing people to the service/course they are looking for. In comparison to the information seeking activity on the website AONTAS received relatively few queries by telephone and email in 2011. However an analysis of these queries provides us with important information on the trends in adult learning. In 2011 AONTAS received 208 direct information requests which yielded the following information:

- The top three most popular queries were returning to education, funding and the Leaving Certificate.
- Information requests in 2011 consisted of 65% female and 35% male.
- Information requests peaked in June, August and November and declined in April, July, October and December.
- 5% of people received a hard copy of the information booklet, many others accessed it through our website.
- Dublin, Cork, Clare, Meath and Tipperary were the top 5 counties in which information requests were received in 2011.
- Of the information requests received in 2011, the most popular study mode was full time study.

### The Information Booklet

The Information Booklet aims to introduce all adult learners and potential adult learners to the options available to them in adult education and training in a way that is comprehensive and easy to understand. From a broad financial supports section, to a thorough list of learning opportunities through to an extensive contacts list, the booklet provides all the information a prospective adult learner might need. The booklet also includes inspirational stories from adult learners who have started their lifelong learning journey and are encouraging others to do the same. During the summer of 2011 the booklet was completely updated and the new version was published at the end of August.

The need for information is evident from the number of viewings of the information booklet; 1803 downloads for the original version and 1249 downloads for the new version. In addition to the downloads, 4351 hard copies were distributed from the end of August to the end of the year to adult learners who requested it directly from AONTAS by phone email or at events, or to AONTAS members who then distributed booklets to their learners.

### AONTAS Update

The AONTAS Update is a weekly e-bulletin designed to keep members informed about current lifelong learning issues as well as what's happening in AONTAS. The bulletin aims to:

- keep AONTAS staff, Executive and members well informed about current lifelong learning issues by providing a weekly round-up of the latest news gathered through the media and the Oireachtas monitoring.
- act as a vehicle for AONTAS staff, Executive and members to communicate with one another on a weekly basis.
- be reader friendly by using photos, hyperlinks and short snappy synopses.

The bulletin is divided into four sections: Policy, Promotion, Membership and Information in line with the AONTAS Resource Pack. It is emailed to

members and to another 300 interested parties every Tuesday afternoon. AONTAS receives very positive feedback about the bulletin from a wide range of recipients and endeavours to use this feedback to develop the potential of the bulletin.

### Resources and Publications

Since 2000 all AONTAS publications are available on the website and the Publications and Links section is the one most frequently visited after the Information Section. AONTAS also maintains a small collection of library resources which are used by AONTAS staff and Executive members to assist them in the completion of submissions, policy papers and research. Public requests usually come from students and researchers in adult and community education. Most resource requests come through the website but hard copy publications which are not on the website because they were published before 2000 are often requested by researchers. Publications most often downloaded for 2011 included the Adult Learner Journal, the Adult Education Guidance Brochure (courtesy of NGCE) and the Community Education Research 'More than just a Course'.

### Information Trends

AONTAS recognizes the need to support its advocacy and policy work with recent data. The AONTAS information team is now undertaking a methodical collection of statistical data relevant to adult and community education. The data collection sources information from:

- AONTAS Information Referral Service
- AONTAS website usage
- AONTAS research
- External research and stakeholders
- Parliamentary Questions
- Media reports
- European publications

The collated statistical data is available through the e-bulletin (links to interesting publications) and used in the AONTAS policy papers and submissions.

## SECTION 3 RAISING THE VOICE OF ADULT LEARNING

### Adult Learners' Festival

The fifth annual Adult Learners' Festival took place from the 21st – 25th February 2011. It was hugely successful with 411 events taking place nationwide. A week of themed events was organized throughout the country as follows:

Monday, 21st February:

**Celebrate Learning**

Tuesday, 22nd February:

**Green Learning**

Wednesday, 23rd February:

**Learning Communities**

Thursday, 24th February:

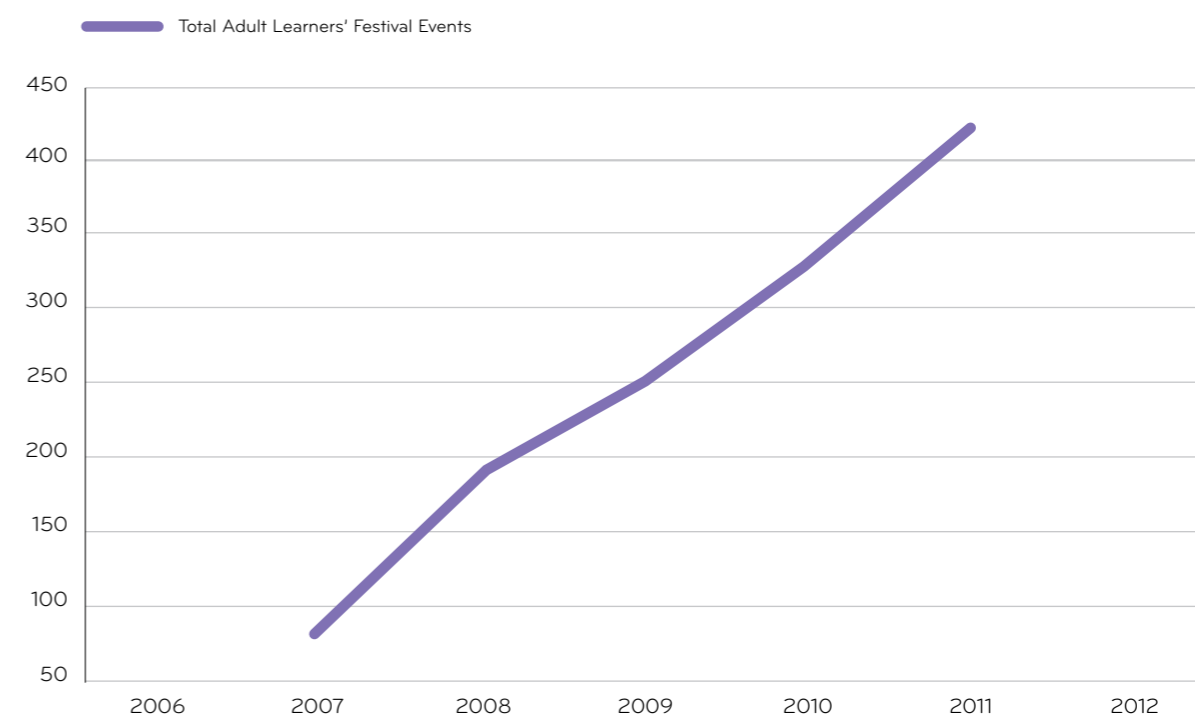
**Learning for Work**

Friday, 25th February:

**Raise your Voice for Adult Learning**

The week of events began with the STAR Awards Ceremony on Celebrate Learning Day when 9 outstanding projects chosen from 84 nominations received awards from Minister Sean Haughey who launched the Festival and Micheal D. Higgins who was the guest speaker. Over 200 guests celebrated the fantastic work undertaken by adult learning projects throughout the country.

Learning Communities Day saw the launch of the Community Education Research 'More than just a Course' while on Learning for Work Day NALA, the National Adult Literacy Agency promoted their distance learning website [www.writeon.ie](http://www.writeon.ie) which offers learners Level 3 FETAC accreditation. Because the General Election fell on Friday 25th February AONTAS was unable to organize a Lobby for Learning day event. Instead AONTAS encouraged



organisers to use their events to engage with their candidates in the lead up to the general election. AONTAS members, adult learners and providers participated in our general election campaign ‘*Raise your Voice for Adult Learning*’ and used their events as an opportunity to showcase the value and promote greater visibility of adult learning to candidates across all political parties.

AONTAS also included learners as part of the general election campaign by asking them to submit stories on their experiences of adult learning. A new story was uploaded on the website on a daily basis in the lead up to the general election. The stories were disseminated via Facebook and Twitter and aimed to highlight the broad spectrum of adult learners, the value of adult and community education, its impact on individuals, families and communities and the importance of adult and community education being adequately resourced. The campaign culminated on Friday the 25th February, the day of the general election.

#### ALF e-bulletin

This update was sent out monthly during the year and then weekly in the run up to the Festival to a mailing list of 4000.

#### Number and Range of Events

The Adult Learners’ Festival has both a local and national dimension with adult and community education providers working tirelessly to celebrate learning in their local communities by holding events during the Festival week. As the Festival is embedded as a promotional event in the adult and community education calendar the number of events has increased steadily since it was first organized in 2007. In 2011 411 events were held which was an increase of 27% on events from 2010.

There was a huge variety of interesting and creative adult learning events taking place throughout the country. The events were held by a range of providers including libraries, VECs, adult education providers, women’s groups and national authorities such as Teagasc. The events encompassed learners markets,

open days, demonstrations, taster classes, workshops, exhibitions, launches and information stands.

#### Participation in Events

From information collated from the evaluation forms the majority of the events aims and objectives were to inform and educate participants about the available learning opportunities, highlight and showcase the work of adult learners and to promote services available locally. A sample of 80 events showed participation of approximately 9,000 prospective learners. Given that 411 events took place, many of which were ‘information events’, the numbers of people expressing an interest in adult and community education is most likely 47,000 for that week.

#### Advertising Campaign

In 2011 AONTAS developed a highly creative approach to designing the advertising campaign for the Festival. A social media campaign identified contemporary experiences of adult learning and three learners worked with an independent producer to distil those stories into 30 second soundbites which were used within a radio advertising campaign in the lead up to the Festival. Ads also directed listeners to the website [www.adultlearnersfestival.com](http://www.adultlearnersfestival.com).

#### Explore

The *Explore* magazine continues to provide a valuable resource for members with three issues of the publication produced during 2011. The magazine provides analysis of latest developments in the sector, a space for news and articles from members, features on examples of practice and policy news. A special edition of the magazine was issued after the Adult Learners’ Festival with contributions from event organisers around the country. The magazine is distributed to members, policy makers and other relevant groups and it is also made available online.

#### Online Marketing

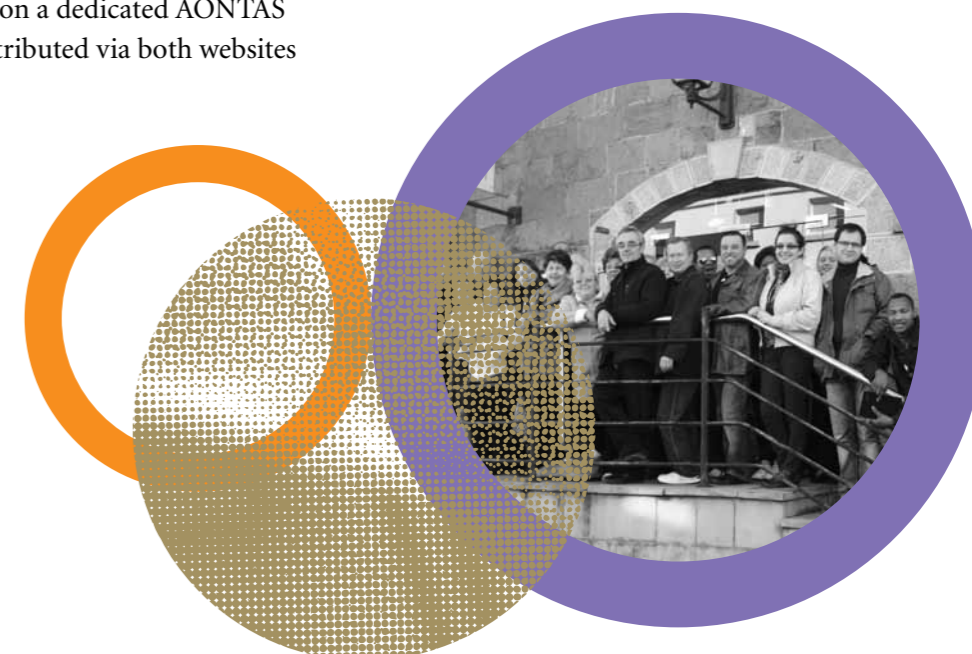
Over the past year AONTAS has developed its capacity to engage in online marketing through investment in skills development in this area. While [www.adultlearnersfestival.com](http://www.adultlearnersfestival.com) is used primarily to promote information about the Festival, [www.aontas.com](http://www.aontas.com) has further developed as a trusted and reputable source of information for adult learners. New features added to the website this year include a blog, which provides another mechanism whereby analysis and positions can be disseminated. The blog also facilitates the sharing of content produced by AONTAS on other websites thus enabling a highly targeted approach. For example, a blog entry about grants for mature students was widely circulated through the Mature Students Officers and was also shared on NUI Maynooth’s website.

#### Social Media Activity

Social media activity intensified over the past year. While the number of Facebook followers for both pages now amounts to 600 the number of Twitter followers increased threefold. Both Facebook and Twitter provide opportunities to engage with members, to provide information on events and learning opportunities, to connect with other relevant organisations, journalists and politicians. New skills developed by members of staff in video production now allow for greater use of video at events. Videos are hosted on a dedicated AONTAS YouTube channel and distributed via both websites and social media profiles.

#### Media Training

AONTAS regularly offers media training and one to one support for groups seeking to improve their media profile. In 2011 AONTAS developed a network of Public Relations Officers (PROs) nationwide, to communicate with and support in advance of the Adult Learners’ Festival. The network includes representatives from adult learning organisations in both the statutory and the community and voluntary sector. In December 2011 AONTAS held a training day for this network. Fourteen PROs from around the country participated in the training, which covered everything from writing press releases right through to using social media.





## SECTION 4 PROMOTING ADULT LEARNING AT HOME AND ABROAD

A key action identified by AONTAS as part of the visibility theme of its strategic plan is to represent our own work and that of the wider sector at national and international fora e.g. through participating in Grundtvig projects, the EAEA and the ICAE. To that end AONTAS has participated actively in a number of key activities at both national and international level during 2011.

### National Representation

- Which Course Expo 2011, the course fair (27th-28th August). 4 members of the AONTAS staff staffed a stand giving information to adult learners and distributing 1000 information booklets.
- North West Inner City Community Information Fair @ the Complex (14th October) – 100 Info booklets distributed.
- GAA Social Initiative Seminar, Croke park (15th October) – 100 Info booklets distributed.
- AHEAD-Better options, IADT (30th November) – 75 info booklet distributed.
- Dublin Inner City Education Fair, Croke park (6th December).

As well as participation at events outlined above members of AONTAS staff and Executive Committee regularly attend seminars and conferences of relevance to adult and community education.

### International Representation

AONTAS was represented by Berni Brady, Niamh O'Reilly and Una Buckley (Learner Ambassador) at the World Assembly of The International Council of Adult Education (ICAE) in Sweden in June 2011.

This event, held every four years comprised two days of presentations and debate on four thematic strands, ranging from the significance of lifelong learning for sustainability in view of climate changes, to the relationship between the right to learn and the right to decent work, and how the Nordic tradition of Folkbildning can help to meet current global challenges. Discussions also centred on international adult education policy, e.g. the Belem Framework for Action from CONFINTEA 6, the Education for All (EFA) agenda and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). AONTAS contributed to the conference declaration which will be used as an international advocacy tool for the adult education sector and through presentations at the GEO and EAEA events.

### European Representation

Niamh O'Reilly was elected to the board of the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) at its General Assembly in June 2011. Her representation will ensure that through shaping the advocacy work of the EAEA, in line with the education policy developments of the European Commission, the interests of adult learners and Irish adult and community education are catered for. Through participation in two board meetings AONTAS directly influenced two key areas of European policy:

- the newly adopted European Commission resolution on a Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning; and
- the Erasmus for All programme.

As proposed by the EAEA, Niamh also represented the Irish adult and community education sector on the skills and validation working group of the European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning, EUCIS-LLL in December. She also gave a keynote presentation and a workshop on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) from the perspective of the community education practitioners at the Adult Learners' Festival in Macedonia during October.

### It is always a good time to learn: Final Conference on Implementing the Action Plan on Adult Learning

The Final conference on implementing the Action Plan on Adult Learning 'It is always a good time to learn' held in Budapest on 7-9 March, brought together more than 250 adult learning stakeholders from over 35 countries, including partners from the United Nations, Council of Europe, OECD, Economic and Social Committee, civil society and the private sector, as well as social partners and representatives from public authorities. The conference was held in the country of the EU presidency and was organized in cooperation with the Hungarian Ministry of Employment. Berni Brady, Director attended on behalf of AONTAS.

The conference marked three years of intensive European cooperation in the field of adult learning policy with the aim of reviewing the results achieved through implementation of the Adult Learning Action Plan, identifying the main challenges faced by adult learning to 2020 and providing feedback from key stakeholders on future needs and actions. Participants unanimously acknowledged the success of the Action Plan (2008-2010) in promoting the adult learning agenda in various ways in all countries, though adult learning and how it is understood still differs hugely between countries. The Working Group report summarizing three years of intensive cooperation between Member States was presented during the conference, along with other studies (e.g. Eurydice, Cedefop).

Conference participants agreed that adult learning makes a vital contribution to addressing many of society's major challenges such as improving the

level of knowledge, skills and competences across the population as an essential element in responding to the economic crisis; coming to terms with demographic change including an ageing society and the increasing incidence of migration; political challenges including the promotion of active citizenship, intercultural awareness, environmental protection and sustainable development; and a whole range of challenges relating to social cohesion and solidarity.

Challenges/obstacles facing adult learning in the years ahead relate to: low visibility; lack of integrated policy-making; under-funding, the need to maintain the full spectrum of adult learning including formal and non-formal learning and a balance between responding to economic and other challenges; low motivation and participation rates; limited language learning; lack of training and qualifications of staff; absence of the necessary flexible teaching methodologies; the need to promote validation within national qualification frameworks; low levels of adult guidance; a lack of data on adult learning (data desert).

### Conclusions of the Conference

To develop the strong and responsive adult learning sector, priority should be given among others to:

- Helping the low skilled and low qualified acquire the key competences for life and work, starting with **basic skills** – adequate literacy, numeracy and digital skills.
- A sophisticated **guidance service** to ensure that adults make the right choices, find the right offers and design a lifelong project for themselves.
- Tailor-made **responses to the individual learner's needs**, supported by a range of pedagogies combined with ICTs, and supported by highly competent teachers to guide them in the knowledge society where everyone should make the best of their abilities.
- **Learning centres/ learning communities and regions**, with a strong link to social networks, which should give adult learning a more

important place in the community, with robust partnerships across all relevant local actors supporting the central role of the public sector.

- **Vital contribution of higher education institutions** which have the dual role of opening up to adult students and providing research and analysis of the sector.
- Developing a greatly improved **knowledge base on adult learning sector**.
- Improving professional development in order to ensure and maintain the **high quality of teaching staff** in the adult learning sector.
- A vibrant new sector, '**learning for a long life**', and for active, autonomous, and healthy ageing, which cultivates inter-generational learning and solidarity between ages, and using the social, cultural and identity capitals of older people, in addition to their human capital.

Regarding the future Action plan, a unanimous view emerged from the conference working groups and panels that the work which has been launched by the 2007 Action plan should continue, thereby helping to ensure that the value and benefits of adult learning for society are fully recognised. A new plan is currently being framed by the Commission.

### Grundtvig Projects

#### InfoNet

InfoNet is a European network of editors in the field of Adult Education and Life Long Learning and a project within the framework of Lifelong Learning/ Grundtvig 4 (2005-2008/2008-2011). It:

- provides a comprehensive, constantly growing database (InfoService) with reports (news, articles, background articles, interviews, etc.) related to adult education (currently around 600 articles).
- provides a thematic information letter (InfoLetter), issued every two months as a PDF file with links to the InfoService database.
- has a network of around 25 correspondents (journalists / experts) all across Europe.

- cooperates with important organisations and networks (e.g. EAEA).

InfoNet material is designed to be made into new articles by the media, as well as being used as a source of information for European institutions and others interested in European adult education issues. All texts are available in English and the original language, and they are written in accordance with special quality standards. InfoNet can currently be used free of charge, including reprinting the texts in the media. InfoNet can be accessed through its website at [www.infonet-ae.net](http://www.infonet-ae.net). Berni Brady acts as the Irish correspondent contributing 6 articles per year and attending the annual milestone conference. In 2011 the InfoNet project reached the final year of its Grundtvig funding and an evaluation of the work was part of the final milestone conference held in Dingden, Germany in May. A proposal for a further three years of Grundtvig funding to continue the project was unsuccessful which was not surprising as it had already been funded through two 3 year project terms. The Steering Group is currently in the process of seeking new funding for a revised project.

### Sowing the Learning Seeds: European Partnership

During 2011 AONTAS continued to develop work on the European project '*Sowing the Learning Seeds*'. This project is funded through Grundtvig and includes participation from organisations based in Estonia, France, the Netherlands, Turkey, Hungary and Slovenia. As part of this project, AONTAS members have had the opportunity to learn from and participate in Learning Festivals throughout Europe. AONTAS hosted a delegation from the project partners during the Adult Learners' Festival. Delegates attended events and the STAR Awards Ceremony, and participated in a seminar on '*Volunteering and Adult Learning*'. AONTAS also invited representation from the AEOA and the AEGAI to participate in visits to Slovenia and Estonia. Seminars included in the visits included promoting adult learning and involving learners in Festivals and learning campaigns. AONTAS will use ideas and learning from our European partners on this project to inform the development of the Festival in the future.

## AONTAS Collaborative Projects

### NALA

As part of our strategic planning process AONTAS and NALA established a joint policy/ promotion group which will meet four times per year to develop strong lines of communication, share information and identify areas where we can work together. The group has met three times in 2011. In April AONTAS and NALA began to work together under the auspices of the Wheel Collaborate Project to explore and implement possible areas of collaboration. The meetings were facilitated by Prospectus Consulting who will prepare a final report. The final meeting was held on June 23rd 2011 and significant progress has been achieved. Outcomes of the process were as follows:

- Each organisation agreed to make an input into each other's promotional events i.e. NALAW, ALF.
- A joint AONTAS/NALA seminar has been held to support community education groups to comply with FETAC accreditation requirements.
- AONTAS and NALA will engage in discussions to develop a draft plan to integrate adult literacy into community education provision with a view to enhancing quality outcomes for learners.
- The AONTAS Learning Advocacy Officer and NALA student committee Chair have met to explore how the respective learner representative bodies within the organisations can work together to enhance the voice for adult learners.
- The staff members with responsibility for organisational development have met to:
  - Share internal documentation templates and policies (standards, staffing, planning, management processes, HR).
  - See how we can best address the technical needs of each organisation by exploring how technical resources/I.T. can be maximised between the organisations.
  - Plan joint staff training and development events.
  - Identify 'who does what' in each organisation in order to enhance communication and to align tasks appropriately.

- Discuss sharing of administrative best practice.
- Discuss the possibility of sharing information on procurement costs with a view to achieving greater efficiencies.

Both organisations have agreed to review progress at the end of each year as part of the evaluation process of our respective strategic plans and include outcomes in our annual reports.

### Age and Opportunity

In order to develop a sustainable mechanism for building the capacity of older people to engage in advocacy activities, Age and Opportunity explored how it can utilise the community education sector to achieve this aim. As part of this work, Age and Opportunity invited AONTAS, as experts in the field, to engage in a meeting in order to gain a greater understanding of the diverse community education sector. Throughout the course of the discussion a number of synergies emerged: the links AONTAS has to the independent community education sector (through the CEN) and VEC supported community education provision, academics in the field and research we have undertaken.

A summary of the collaborative work which resulted from this partnership work includes:

- AONTAS participation in a seminar on how community education can support the work of Age and Opportunity.
- Age and Opportunity participation at a CEN/ NALA seminar on FETAC validation (22nd June 2011).
- Incorporated an Age and Opportunity focus group with community education practitioners into a national CEN meeting (4th May 2011).
- AONTAS made data from the community education research 'More Than Just a Course' available to Age and Opportunity for reanalysis. Age and Opportunity were able to focus on a specific age group (55 plus) which met their research needs.

### The Adult Learner

The Adult learner is the Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education founded in the mid eighties as a collaborative project between AONTAS and the Adult Education Officers' Association. Over the years the publication has developed and expanded and the collaborative partnership has widened to include the higher education sector with members of the Editorial Board coming from, University College, Cork, University College, Galway, University College, Dublin, Dublin City University and the University of Strathclyde. The Board includes two Adult Education Officers nominated by the AEOA and two members of AONTAS staff, Berni Brady, Director who chairs the Board and Eleonora Peruffo who provides administrative and secretarial support.

The Journal is published annually and its aim is to serve the needs of the adult education and lifelong learning community both in Ireland and internationally by providing a forum for critical discussion and reflection. The Journal seeks to make new knowledge easily accessible to the widest possible audience through emphasizing the importance of describing and critiquing practice and through publishing the results of research. Priority is given to subject matter which addresses disadvantage, social exclusion, equality and citizenship. It also includes contributions on how adults learn in both formal and non-formal settings including life and work contexts. The Journal has limited availability in hard copy but can be viewed or downloaded from the AONTAS website, where further details on how individuals can make contributions are made available each year.



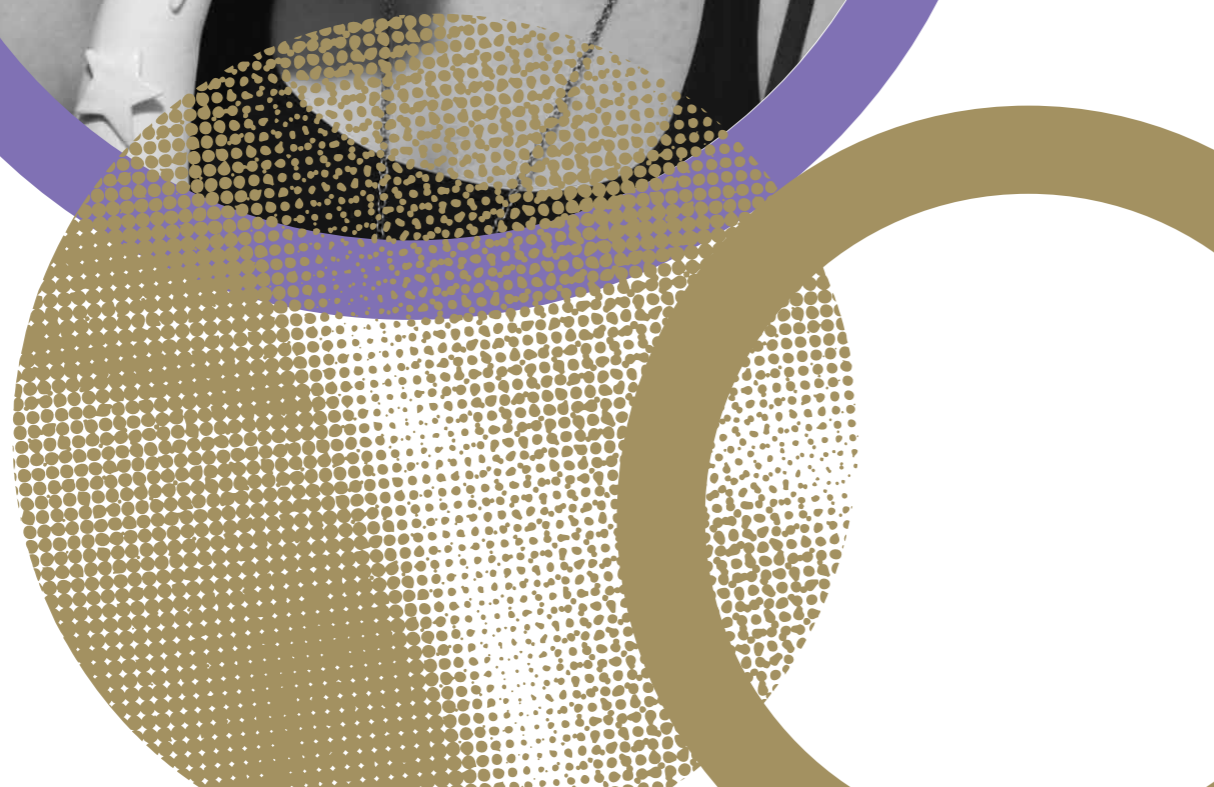
# AONTAS FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2011

Registration Number 80958

Charity Number 6719

## Company Information

<b>Directors</b>	Ms. Marian Duffy ( <i>President</i> ) Ms. Loretta Needham ( <i>Vice-President</i> ) Ms. Maria Gorman ( <i>Hon. Treasurer</i> ) Ms. Ruth Smith ( <i>Hon. Secretary</i> ) Ms. Deborah Brock Ms. Mary Hilda Cavanagh ( <i>elected May 2011</i> ) Ms. Lorraine Cunningham Mr. Michael Murray Mr. John Ryan Ms. Liz Waters Mr. Liam Kilbride Ms. Gillian Wild ( <i>elected May 2011</i> ) Ms. Linda Greene ( <i>term completed May 2011</i> ) Ms. Eithne Nic Dhonnchadha ( <i>term completed May 2011</i> ) Ms. Elva O'Callaghan ( <i>term completed May 2011</i> ) Mr. Lorne Patterson ( <i>term completed May 2011</i> )	<b>Auditors</b>	Anne Brady McQuillans DFK Chartered Accountants & Registered Auditors Iveagh Court Harcourt Road Dublin 2
		<b>Business Address</b>	83-87 Main Street Ranelagh Dublin 6
		<b>Bankers</b>	Bank of Ireland Lower Baggot Street Dublin 2
		<b>Solicitors</b>	P.J. Walsh & Company Solicitors 12 Upper Fitzwilliam Street Dublin 2
		<b>Registered Office</b>	83-87 Main Street Ranelagh Dublin 6
<b>Secretary</b>	Ms. Ruth Smith		



## Directors' Report for the year ended 31st December 2011

The directors present their report and the audited financial statements for the year ended 31st December 2011.

### Principal Activities, Business Review and Future Developments

The principal activity of the company is to advocate for the right of every adult in Ireland to quality learning.

The company is limited by guarantee and not having a share capital.

Both the level of activity and the year end financial position were satisfactory and the directors expect that the present level of activity will be sustained for the foreseeable future.

### Results

The surplus for the year after providing for depreciation and taxation amounted to €64,491 (2010 – €8,157).

### Going Concern

The company is dependant on income provided from government funders, membership and donations. As with many government funded charities, the company is affected by both the budgetary constraints implemented by the national government and the deteriorating external economic restraints. The directors have reviewed all relevant information and are confident that the company has adequate financial resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. Consequently, the directors consider it appropriate to prepare the financial statements on a going concern basis.

## Directors' Report for the year ended 31st December 2011

The Executive Committee constitutes the Board of Directors of the company under the terms of Article 28 of the Articles of Association of the company:

Ms. Marian Duffy (*President*)

Ms. Loretta Needham (*Vice-President*)

Ms. Maria Gorman (*Hon. Treasurer*)

Ms. Ruth Smith (*Hon. Secretary*)

Ms. Deborah Brock

Ms. Mary Hilda Cavanagh

Ms. Lorraine Cunningham

Mr. Michael Murray

Mr. John Ryan

Ms. Liz Waters

Mr. Liam Kilbride

Ms. Gillian Wild

There were no changes in members between 31st December 2011 and the date of signing the financial statements.

### Books of Account

The measures taken by the directors to ensure compliance with the requirements of Section 202, Companies Act, 1990, regarding proper books of account are the implementation of necessary policies and procedures for recording transactions, the employment of competent accounting personnel with appropriate expertise and the provision of adequate resources to the financial function. The books of account of the company are maintained at the business address.

## Directors' Report for the year ended 31st December 2011

### Principal Risks and Uncertainties

The directors have assessed the risks and have taken measures to manage these risks in AONTAS as follows:

#### Market Risk

In common with many government funded charities, the company is affected by both the budgetary constraints implemented by the national government and the deteriorating external economic conditions. The directors are confident that the company has adequate financial resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future.

#### Fraud Risk

This risk is mitigated by maintaining segregation of duties for receipt of funds and the payment of creditors. The directors have put processes and controls in place to ensure that detailed checking is carried out at all stages to ensure the accuracy and validity of all transactions.

#### Auditors

The auditors, Anne Brady McQuillans DFK, have indicated their willingness to continue in office in accordance with the provisions of Section 160(2) of the Companies Act, 1963.

#### Section 40(1) Companies Act, 1983

Section 40(1) of the Companies (Amendment) Act 1983 does not apply as the company is limited by guarantee.

#### Events after the Balance Sheet date

There have been no circumstances or events subsequent to the year end, which require adjustment to or disclosure in the financial statements or in the notes thereto.

On behalf of the Board

**Ms. Marian Duffy**  
President

**Ms. Maria Gorman**  
Hon. Treasurer

Date: 31st March 2012

## Statement of Directors' Responsibilities

The directors are responsible for preparing the Directors' Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable Irish law and Generally Accepted Accounting Practice in Ireland including the accounting standards issued by the Accounting Standards Board and published by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland.

Irish Company Law requires the directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the company and of the profit or loss of the company for that period.

In preparing those financial statements, the directors are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently.
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent.
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in business.

The directors confirm that they have complied with the above requirements in preparing the financial statements.

The directors are responsible for keeping proper books of account which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the company and to enable them to ensure that the financial statements are prepared in accordance with accounting standards generally accepted in Ireland and with Irish statute comprising the Companies Acts, 1963 to 1983 and 1990 to 2009, and all Regulations to be construed as on with those Acts.

They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the company and hence, for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

In so far as the directors are aware:

- there is no relevant audit information (information needed by the company's auditors in connection with preparing their report) of which the company's auditors are unaware; and
- the directors have taken all the steps that they ought to have taken to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the company's auditors are aware of that information.

On behalf of the Board

**Ms. Marian Duffy**  
President

**Ms. Maria Gorman**  
Hon. Treasurer

Date: 31st March 2012

## Independent Auditors' Report to the Members of AONTAS

We have audited the financial statements of AONTAS for the year ended 31st December 2011 which comprises the Statement of Financial Activities, Balance Sheet, Cash Flow and the related notes. These financial statements have been prepared under the accounting policies set out therein.

### Respective Responsibilities of Directors and Auditors

As described in the Statement of Directors' Responsibilities the company's directors are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and generally accepted accounting practice in Ireland including the accounting standards issued by the Accounting Standards Board and published by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland (Generally Accepted Accounting Practice in Ireland).

Our responsibility is to audit the financial statements in accordance with relevant legal and regulatory requirements and International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland).

This report is made solely to the company's members, as a body, in accordance with section 193 of the Companies Act, 1990. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the company's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the company and the company's members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinion we have formed.

We report to you our opinion as to whether the financial statements give a true and fair view in accordance with the Generally Accepted Accounting Practice in Ireland and are properly prepared in accordance with the Companies Acts 1963 to 1983 and 1990 to 2009. We also report to you whether in our opinion: proper books of account have been kept by the company and whether the information given in the Directors' Report is consistent with the financial statements. In addition, we state whether we have obtained all the information and explanations necessary for the purposes of our audit, and whether the financial statements are in agreement with the books of account.

We report to the members if, in our opinion, any information specified by law regarding directors' remuneration or directors' transactions is not disclosed and, where practicable, include such information in our report.

We read the directors' report and consider implications for our report if we become aware of any apparent misstatements within it.

## Independent Auditors' Report to the Members of AONTAS

### Basis of Audit Opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland), issued by the Auditing Practices Board. An audit includes examination, on a test basis, of evidence relevant to the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements. It also includes an assessment of the significant estimates and judgements made by the directors in the preparation of the financial statements, and of whether the accounting policies are appropriate to the company's circumstances, consistently applied and adequately disclosed.

We planned and performed our audit so as to obtain all the information and explanations which we considered necessary in order to provide us with sufficient evidence to give reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material misstatement, whether caused by fraud or other irregularity or error. In forming our opinion we also evaluated the overall adequacy of the presentation of information in the financial statements.

We have undertaken the audit in accordance with the requirements of the APB Ethical Standards including the APB Ethical Standard, Provisions Available for Small Entities.

### Opinion

In our opinion the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view, in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Practice in Ireland, of the state of the company's affairs as at the 31st December 2011 and of its net incoming resources and cashflows for the year then ended; and
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Acts, 1963 to 1983 and 1990 to 2009.

We have obtained all the information and explanations we consider necessary for the purposes of our audit. In our opinion, proper books of account have been kept by the company. The financial statements are in agreement with the books of account.

In our opinion, the information given in the directors' report is consistent with the financial statements.

Section 40(1) of the Companies (Amendment) Act 1983 does not apply as the company is limited by guarantee.

Anne Brady (Statutory Auditor)  
For and on behalf of

Anne Brady McQuillans DFK  
Chartered Accountants  
& Registered Auditors  
Iveagh Court  
Harcourt Road  
Dublin 2

Date: 31st March 2012

## Statement of Financial Activities for the year ended 31st December 2011

		2011	2010
	Notes	€	€
<b>INCOME</b>			
Restricted and unrestricted funds	2	1,149,839	993,960
<b>Resources Expended</b>			
<b>Administration</b>			
Salary costs		169,798	168,899
Pension scheme		26,441	25,882
Staff training and expenses		13,185	8,310
Sundry staff costs		2,930	1,354
Postage and courier services		19,666	15,460
Stationery		5,483	7,944
Telephone		7,472	8,133
Travel and subsistence		5,841	5,629
Executive and general committee expenses		8,186	11,041
Legal fees		7,945	55
Audit and accountancy fees		6,748	6,716
Bank interest and charges		681	770
Representation and affiliation		12,975	9,138
Miscellaneous		536	140
Rent of venues and equipment		825	850
Computer costs		1,345	2,271
Research and projects apportionments		(23,126)	(38,834)
		<b>266,931</b>	<b>233,758</b>
<b>Premises</b>			
Light and heat		3,692	3,718
Rent and rates		78,817	78,911
Repairs and maintenance		20,037	20,037
Leasing charges		4,341	6,688
Insurance		6,589	8,022
Cleaning		4,233	3,261
Depreciation of computers and office equipment		10,634	10,372
Deficit on disposal of tangible assets		320	-
		<b>128,663</b>	<b>131,009</b>

## Statement of Financial Activities for the year ended 31st December 2011

		2011	2010
	Notes	€	€
<b>Development</b>			
Salary costs		348,363	300,653
Pension scheme		39,231	38,118
Consultants and contract staff		65	450
Travel and subsistence		2,761	681
Printing and publications		44,026	40,373
Conferences / seminars / membership meetings		57,202	27,453
Public relations strategy		4,092	5,110
Adult learner festival		92,967	96,932
Information resources		2,226	5,410
Recruitment		90	2,250
Childcare		275	150
		<b>591,298</b>	<b>517,580</b>
<b>Research and Projects</b>			
Research		21,687	63,774
Quality Assurance Framework		62,963	38,888
InfoNet Milestone Conference		-	182
Grundtvig Sowing the Learning Seeds		13,806	612
		<b>98,456</b>	<b>103,456</b>

## Statement of Financial Activities for the year ended 31st December 2011

		2011	2010
	Notes	€	€
<b>Income</b>			
Total incoming resources	2	1,149,839	993,960
<b>Resources Expended</b>			
Total resources expended		(1,085,348)	(985,803)
Net surplus resources for year	10	64,491	8,157

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the year. All incoming resources and resources expended derive from continuing activities.

The notes on pages 41 – 48 form part of the financial statements.

The financial statements were approved by the Board on 31st March 2012 and signed on its behalf by

Ms. Marian Duffy  
President

Ms. Maria Gorman  
Hon. Treasurer

## Balance Sheet as at 31st December 2011

		2011		2010	
	Notes	€	€	€	€
<b>Fixed Assets</b>					
Tangible Assets	7		4,080		12,128
<b>Current Assets</b>					
Debtors	8	22,161		11,652	
Cash at bank and in hand		97,517		234,999	
		<b>119,678</b>		<b>246,651</b>	
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	9	(8,292)		(207,804)	
Net Current Assets			<b>111,386</b>		<b>38,847</b>
Total Assets Less Current Liabilities			<b>115,466</b>		<b>50,975</b>
<b>Funds</b>					
Unrestricted Funds	13		115,466		50,975
Total Funds			<b>115,466</b>		<b>50,975</b>

The notes on pages 41 – 48 form part of the financial statements.

The financial statements were approved by the Board on 31st March 2012 and signed on its behalf by

Ms. Marian Duffy  
President

Ms. Maria Gorman  
Hon. Treasurer

## Cash Flow Statement for the year ended 31st December 2011

		2011	2010
	Notes	€	€
<b>Reconciliation of surplus to net cash (outflow) / inflow from operating activities</b>			
Net incoming resources (before interest)		64,469	7,504
Depreciation		10,954	10,372
(Increase) / decrease in debtors		(10,509)	17,859
(Decrease) / increase in creditors		(199,512)	(32,191)
<b>Net cash (outflow) / inflow from operating activities</b>		<b>(134,598)</b>	<b>3,544</b>
<b>Cash Flow Statement</b>			
Net cash (outflow) / inflow from operating activities		(134,598)	3,544
Returns on investments and servicing of finance	11	22	653
Capital expenditure	11	(2,906)	(374)
<b>(Decrease) / Increase in cash in the year</b>		<b>(137,482)</b>	<b>3,823</b>
<b>Reconciliation of net cash flow to movement in net funds (Note 12)</b>			
(Decrease) / increase in cash in the year		(137,482)	3,823
Net funds at 1st January 2011	12	234,999	231,176
<b>Net funds at 31st December 2011</b>		<b>97,517</b>	<b>234,999</b>

The notes on pages 41-48 form part of the financial statements.

The financial statements were approved by the Board on 31st March 2012 and signed on its behalf by

Ms. Marian Duffy  
President

Ms. Maria Gorman  
Hon. Treasurer

## Notes to the Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2011

## 1. Accounting Policies

The following accounting policies have been applied consistently in dealing with items which are considered material in relation to the company's financial statements.

## 1.1. Accounting Convention

The accounts have been prepared under the historical cost convention and with reference to the recommendations of the revised Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) Accounting and Reporting by Charities issued by the Charity Commissioners in 2005.

## 1.2. Tangible Fixed Assets and Depreciation

All tangible fixed assets are initially recorded at historic cost.

Depreciation is provided on all tangible fixed assets at rates calculated to write off the cost or valuation, less residual value, of each asset over its expected useful life, as follows:

Fixtures, Fittings and Equipment	–	20% Straight Line
Computer Equipment	–	20% Straight Line
Office Equipment	–	20% Straight Line

## 1.3. Leasing Commitments

Rentals payable under operating leases are charged against income on a straight line basis over the lease term.

## 1.4. Income Resources

Grant income receivable from the Department of Education and Science in respect of the Womens Quality Assurance Framework and grant income receivable from the Wheel Organisation, TUI, ASTI, NQAI, Teagasc and Bluebrick are treated as being restricted as the incomes are applied for particular purposes. All other income receivable is treated as being unrestricted.

Voluntary income including donations, gifts and legacies and grants from the Department of Education and Science that provide core funding or are of general nature are recognised where there is entitlement, certainty of receipt and the amount can be measured with sufficient reliability. Such income is only deferred when:

- The donor specifies that the grant or donation must only be used in future accounting periods; or
- The donor has imposed conditions which must be met before the charity has unconditional entitlement.

## Notes to the Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2011

## 1.5. Resources expended

Expenditure is recognised when a liability is incurred. Contractual arrangements and performance related grants are recognised as goods or services are supplied. Other grant payments are recognised when a constructive obligation arises that result in the payment being unavoidable.

- Costs of generating funds are those costs incurred in attracting voluntary income, and those incurred in trading activities that raise funds.
- Charitable activities include expenditure associated with the educational programmes include both the direct costs and support costs relating to this activity.

## 1.6. Pensions

AONTAS operates a defined contribution scheme and pension benefits are funded over the employees' period of service by way of contributions from the company and employees. Contributions are charged to the Statement of Financial Activities in the period to which they relate.

## Notes to the Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2011

2. Sources of income	2011	2010
	€	€
<b>Restricted Funds</b>		
Department of Foreign Affairs – Irish Aid Research Grant	-	3,545
Department of Education and Science Grants:		
BTEI Research	-	4,402
Research	14,067	43,775
Quality Assurance Framework Project	56,710	38,887
NQAI Festival Sponsorship	4,000	-
Teagasc Festival Sponsorship	1,000	-
TUI Festival Sponsorship	1,000	2,000
ICTU Festival Sponsorship	-	4,500
ASTI Festival Sponsorship	500	500
IOT Festival Sponsorship	-	1,500
The Wheel Training Links Grant	4,000	1,000
Bluebrick Festival Sponsorship	750	-
Grundtvig Sowing the Learning Seeds	14,160	612
	<b>96,187</b>	<b>100,721</b>
<b>Unrestricted Funds</b>		
Department of Education and Science:		
Grant in Aid (Core Funding)	483,736	391,264
S.P.I.D.A.S. supplement	529,736	474,764
Members' subscriptions	20,568	23,678
National conference	16,491	(200)
Bank interest received	22	653
Miscellaneous	3,099	3,080
	<b>1,053,652</b>	<b>893,239</b>
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>1,149,839</b>	<b>993,960</b>

## Notes to the Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2011

Included in income on previous page is deferred income from the prior year as follows:	2011	2010
	€	€
Department of Foreign Affairs – Irish Aid Research Grant	-	3,545
Department of Education & Science:		
Grant in Aid (Core Funding)	48,736	-
S.P.I.D.A.S. supplement	68,736	43,500
Department of Education & Science Grants:		
Research	14,067	77,842
Quality Assurance Framework Project	54,575	93,462
BTEI Research	-	4,402
Grundtvig Sowing the Learning Seeds	13,788	-
	<b>199,902</b>	<b>222,751</b>
In summary:		
Income received in the year	949,937	971,111
Deferred income from prior year	199,902	222,751
Deferred income to following year	-	(199,902)
	<b>1,149,839</b>	<b>993,960</b>

## Notes to the Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2011

## 3. Net Incoming Resources for the year

	2011	2010
	€	€
Net Incoming Resources for the year is stated after charging:		
Depreciation of tangible assets	10,634	10,372
Loss on disposal of tangible fixed assets	320	-
<b>Operating lease rentals</b>		
- Office equipment	4,341	6,688
Auditors' remuneration	<b>6,748</b>	<b>5,197</b>

## 4. Employees

	2011	2010
	€	€
<b>Number of employees</b>		
The average monthly numbers of employees during the year were:	9	9
<b>Employment costs</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2010</b>
	€	€
Wages and salaries	518,161	469,552
Other pension costs	65,672	64,000
	<b>583,833</b>	<b>533,552</b>

## 5. Pension costs

The company operates a defined contribution pension scheme. Contributions are made by both the employee and the employer. The assets of the scheme are held separately from those of the company in an independently administered fund. The pension cost charge represents contributions payable by AONTAS to the fund and amount to €65,672 (2010 : €64,000).

## Notes to the Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2011

## 6. Taxation

No charge to current or deferred taxation arises as the company has been granted exemption by the Revenue authorities in Ireland.

## 7. Tangible Assets

	Computer equipment	Office equipment	Fixtures, fittings and equipment	Totals
	€	€	€	€
<b>Cost</b>				
At 1st January 2011	63,313	11,713	49,519	124,545
Additions	2,906	-	-	2,906
Disposals	(1,597)	-	-	(1,597)
At 31st December 2011	<b>64,622</b>	<b>11,713</b>	<b>49,519</b>	<b>125,854</b>
<b>Depreciation</b>				
At 1st January 2011	55,282	7,616	49,519	112,417
On Disposals	(1,277)	-	-	(1,277)
Charge for the year	8,291	2,343	-	10,634
At 31st December 2011	<b>62,296</b>	<b>9,959</b>	<b>49,519</b>	<b>121,774</b>
<b>Net book value</b>				
At 31st December 2011	2,326	1,754	-	4,080
At 31st December 2010	<b>8,031</b>	<b>4,097</b>	-	<b>12,128</b>

## 8. Debtors

	2011	2010
	€	€
Other debtors	15,197	11,652
Prepayments	6,964	-
	<b>22,161</b>	<b>11,652</b>

## Notes to the Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2011

## 9. Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year

	2011	2010
	€	€
Trade creditors	792	-
Deferred income	-	199,902
Accruals	7,500	7,902
	<b>8,292</b>	<b>207,804</b>

## 10. Reconciliation of movements in funds

	Statement of Financial Activities	Total
	2011	2010
	€	€
Fund balance at beginning of year	50,975	42,818
Net movement in funds	64,491	8,157
Fund balance at end of year	<b>115,466</b>	<b>50,975</b>

## 11. Gross Cash Flows

	2011	2010
	€	€
<b>Returns on investments and servicing of finance</b>		
Interest received	22	653
<b>Capital expenditure</b>		
Payments to acquire tangible assets	<b>2,906</b>	<b>374</b>

## 12. Analysis of changes in net funds

	Opening balance	Cash flows	Closing balance
	€	€	€
Cash at bank and in hand	234,999	(137,482)	97,517
Net funds	<b>234,999</b>	<b>(137,482)</b>	<b>97,517</b>

## Notes to the Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2011

## 13. Reserves

	Balance at beginning of year	Incoming resources	Resources expended	Transfer to designated reserve	Balance at end of year
	€	€	€	€	€
<b>Specific Funds:</b>					
Restricted grants	-	96,187	(96,187)	-	-
Unrestricted grants	50,975	1,053,652	(989,161)	(45,000)	70,466
Designated reserve	-	-	-	45,000	45,000
	<b>50,975</b>	<b>1,149,839</b>	<b>1,085,348</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>115,466</b>

At the year end the directors decided to transfer €45,000 from unrestricted reserves to a designated reserve. The designated reserves is to be used for the following purposes:

- Research project €30,000
- Purchase of equipment €10,000
- Professional fees in relation to the possibility of changing premises €5,000

## 14. Non-Audit Services Provided by Auditors

In common with many other businesses of our size and nature we use our auditors to prepare and submit the financial statements.

## 15. Status

The liability of the members is limited.

Every member of the company undertakes to contribute to the assets of the company in the event of its being wound up while they are members or within one year thereafter for the payment of the debts and liabilities of the company contracted before they ceased to be members and the costs, charges and expenses of winding up and for the adjustment of the rights of the contributors among themselves such amount as may be required, not exceeding €6.35.

## 16. Approval of Financial Statements

The financial statements were approved by the Board on 31st March 2012 and signed on its behalf by

Ms. Marian Duffy  
President

Ms. Maria Gorman  
Hon. Treasurer